

Rock Steady

2008 Harley-Davidson Softail Rocker C » Shocks and awe



RIDING STYLE

Helmet: Shoei RJ-Platinum R
 Eyewear: Harley-Davidson Profile
 Jacket: Tour Master Coaster II
 Gloves: Shift Primer
 Pants: Shift Torque Street Jeans
 Boots: Wesco Boss

By Mike Schulte » Nothing recharges the rebel mojo like a chopper. Well, nothing that's legal anyway. Straddling a snarling V-Twin with fists forward in the universal posture of insubordination is a bestial remedy for dispiriting times. Since the dawn of the custom era, maverick souls have forged chopped, slammed and raked sculptures around Harley-Davidson's iconic engines. The equally iconic Willie G. melded radical custom styling with the kind of exhaustive R&D and factory warranty only

possible from a large manufacturer such as the Motor Company by authoring the factory-custom genre. With the unveiling of the low, stretched Softail Rocker, Harley-Davidson is intent on revitalizing the species.

The 2008 Rocker rolls in two editions, each designed to appeal to a specific breed of rider. The standard Rocker is trimmed in satin champagne powdercoat throughout, for a rougher, raw appearance. Its chromed counterpart, the Rocker C, is aimed at the high-end

rider, with extensive color matching, swirling flame paintwork and gleaming Milwaukee chrome. Another feature exclusive to the Rocker C lurks beneath its solo seat. Flipping up the cushion reveals a stowed pillion and chrome strut that folds up to create a suspended passenger perch. Despite its diminutive appearance, the pillion has a 250-pound capacity and creates the illusion that the passenger is floating behind the rider.

In the case of both Rocker siblings, the most striking innovation begins

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where the bike ends. Named for its ingenious Rockertail rear end—a derivation of the shock-concealing Softail design—the Rockers replicate the clean lines of a slammed, hardtail chopper, without the vertebrae-powderizing repercussions. The swingarm's elliptical tubes flow organically from the frame lines. The broad, low profile fender is attached directly to the swingarm and hovers a bare knuckle's width above the big 240mm x 18-inch Dunlop rear tire without any discernible support.

Underway, function emerges from form as the fender, wheel and swingarm

“rock” in unison through the 3.4 inches of available cushion. As with H-D's Nightster, integrated LED stop/turn/tail indicators eliminate the need for a traditional center-mount taillight and add to the posterior's clean, custom vibe. Only a license plate holder obstructs the Rockers' southern exposure.

Up front, the chopper attitude stretches out with a 36.5-degree rake—kicked six degrees farther than other Softails—resulting in Harley's longest-ever wheelbase at nearly 70 inches. Curvaceously sculpted 5-inch chrome risers that look as though they might

have emerged from Brancusi's Cycle Works sit atop the stout 49mm Showa forks. Two-piece, internally wired pull-back V-bars top off the Rocker C's stylish upper reaches.

The stretched 5-gallon tank, reminiscent of the discontinued Deuce's canteen, sports a raised, speed-shop speedometer that features a reverse mileage count-down function, so you'll know precisely whether or not passing that gas station up ahead is a tactically sound decision. Among the abundant styling cues are the chromed 19-inch five-spoke cast aluminum front wheel, a color-matched



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finned horseshoe oil tank, a hand grenade shaped ignition coil, and the Bar and Shield Harley-Davidson emblem recessed into the fuel tank. The design team sought to imbue the Rocker with a host of details that would have owners discovering minute styling touches months after their purchases.

Garage-bound reveries aside, the Rocker C is built to roll. Dropping into the wide seat, which at just over 25 inches is among the lowest available on a production bike, enables even riders with oversquare waistband-to-inseam ratios to plant their boots firmly, despite the distended primary necessitated by the massive 240 rear bun.

Likewise, the stretch to reach the forward controls and pullback bars is choppy, comfortable and cool. The Rocker C rigid-mounted, balanced Twin-Cam

96B mill and 6-speed Cruise Drive powertrain displays plenty of the familiar Harley low-end muscle, inducing you to push back into the low-slung seat and twist blissfully through the rev range.

Harley-Davidson refers to the Rockers as “canyon carvers,” and even at low speeds, the Rocker C has no business handling as well as it does. You would expect the 37.5-degree fork angle to inspire curses through clenched teeth while executing tight radius U-turns in the city, but the lanky chopper proves surprisingly agile in confined spaces.

On the open road the Rocker C feels extremely stable. Cornering requires little coercion, considering the ample rear tire. However, briskly executed sweepers demand more consideration of the bike’s radical geometry to avoid an audience with the guardrail. The generally precise

handling is aided by the new frame and increased chassis stiffness. Harley-Davidson also touts an improved front and rear brake system. Certainly, the big 4-piston front and 2-piston rear setup are more than adequate to slap the cuffs on the 720-pound Rocker C when necessary.

A year after undertaking the most ambitious new engine program in the Motor Company’s history, Harley-Davidson is not exactly idling through its 105th birthday celebration. Director of Motorcycle Product Development, Bill Davidson predicts 2008 will be, “a year to reinforce our leadership in the custom marketplace.” In that particular marketplace, look for the Rockers on aisle 13, between the brass knuckles and the flamethrowers.

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